

'Lather Against Ebola', an 'Ice Bucket' challenge against the virus

September 18 2014, by Joris Fioriti

Bringing a soapy twist to the "Ice Bucket Challenge" that has swept the world in recent weeks, Ivorians are raising awareness about the deadly disease outbreak in west Africa with a new "Lather Against Ebola" campaign.

People in Ivory Coast do use ice in their variation, but have added a good head of lather to alert others to the need for hygiene to ward off the Ebola epidemic raging in neighbouring countries.

The campaign has already flooded Twitter and Facebook feeds in the region with the French hashtag "#MousserContreEbola"—helping raise awareness about a virus that has claimed more than 2,400 lives in neighbouring Guinea and Liberia, as well as Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

Instead of cash donations, participants are encouraged to donate bars of soap and bottles of antiseptic.

The original Ice Bucket Challenge is a hugely successful viral campaign in which people challenged their friends to film themselves pouring ice water over their heads. It has raised millions of dollars worldwide to fund research into a fatal degenerative nervous disorder called [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis](#) or ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease after a renowned US baseball player.

Ivory Coast, which has shut its long, porous borders with Liberia and Guinea and banned flights from the affected nations, has yet to report

any cases of Ebola, but panicking locals are resorting to measures like drinking salted water or eating onions in the mistaken belief they prevent infection.

The Soap Bucket Challenge is the brainchild of Edith Brou, one of the country's most prominent Twitter users, who decided it would be a good idea to "tropicalise" the ice bucket trend.

She got the ball rolling last month with a video of herself being drenched on the balcony of the small online marketing firm where she works in the commercial capital Abidjan.

"Against Ebola, you need good hygiene," she says in the video before a bucket of ice-cold soapy water is dunked on her head. It gave her a tenacious cold, she said, but was rewarded with almost 4,000 hits on the video.

Brou challenged three famous bloggers, including La Rigueur Bino—real name Nouho Bamba—who claims to have 150,000 followers.

His contribution—in which he wore a smart suit and ended up throwing himself in a swimming pool with a suitcase in his hand—garnered more than 52,000 viewers.

"I knew that jumping into a pool would create a buzz," said Bamba, who works for a phone company. "Today, even children need to understand what Ebola is."

The vital web

With 1.4 million Facebook accounts in the country and hundreds of thousands of mobile phones, the Internet has played an increasingly important role in politics and society in Ivory Coast.

With Ebola, bloggers have a new opportunity to show their influence. One of them, Israel Yoroba Guebo, has even come up with a song, "Stop Ebola", that is being used as the waiting tone by one phone operator.

They have made their presence felt over numerous issues in recent years, including the negligent death in April of a young model left untreated at Abidjan's Central University Hospital after an assault, and the New Year's stampede outside Abidjan stadium in 2013 in which 61 people died.

Social networks also proved a powerful resource during the violence that followed the disputed election in 2010, when more than 3,000 people were killed in five months.

A hashtag #CIVsocial was used on Twitter to help coordinate relief efforts and share information.

"We even had a doctor help women give birth over the phone," said Brou.

"It is only thanks to the social networks that we were able to save lives."

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